

When Disagreements and Separations Turn Absolutely Hateful

John the beloved—also known as the apostle of love—offers some convicting words in his epistles. While John's Gospel demonstrates the living, breathing God of love made flesh in the person of Jesus, his epistles speak our need to manifest that love one to another—and connects this love tightly to our relationship to Christ, deception and even salvation.

In 1 John 2:9-11, he shares, "Whoever says he is in the light but hates his brother is in darkness even until now. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

In 1 John 3:10 he admonishes, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: Whoever does not live in righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

In 1 John 3:14-15, he writes, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love his brother remains in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him."

In 1 John 4:7-8 he warns, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Finally, in 1 John 4:20-21, John puts it bluntly: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar. For

whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? We have this commandment from Him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Hateful Words Should Not Mark Separations

John, the apostle of love, spoke some strong words that should spur us all to reevaluate our love walk, especially in the face of separations. In this season, I’m seeing hatred rise up in the midst of believers—even in ministry. The very ones who should be modeling the way of love are crucifying each other on social media, in green rooms and in their own minds. I don’t see this level of hatred between ministers in the Bible. Two examples come to mind:

“After some time Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let’s go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.’ Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord’s gracious care. Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there” (Acts 15:36-41, NLT).

Paul and Barnabas had a strong disagreement and went their separate ways. But these two men of God didn’t try to tear one another’s ministries down. In fact, Paul later told the church at Corinth Barnabas’ ministry was worthy of support (see 1 Cor. 9:6). Paul later told the church at Colossae to welcome John Mark if he showed up in their midst (see Col. 4:10). And Paul even requested John Mark’s presence in his second letter to Timothy, though Bible scholars say this was likely a decade later after Mark matured (2 Tim. 4:11).

Likewise, when Abraham and Lot separated, they didn’t try to

destroy one another's reputations with secret statements and not-so-secret phone calls casting aspersions of wrongdoing on innocent hands. No, Abraham actually went to war to rescue Lot from danger (see Gen. 14) and later interceded for his life when God set out to destroy Sodom (see Gen. 18:22-19:29). This is true love.

Walking in Love During Disagreement

In the Paul-Barnabas/Abraham-Lot incidents, we have scriptural precedence for people of God agreeing to disagree without strife and even commending each other's work in the Lord publicly. But whether it's leaving a church, divorcing a spouse, quitting a job or cutting ties with a once-best-friend, so often Christians choose, rather, to launch social media smear campaigns and vicious lies about a person's character and motives.

Why can't modern-day believers disagree about issues and go their separate ways without the passive-aggressive Facebook Live videos and subliminal status updates? James offers some insight:

"Where do wars and fights among you come from? Do they not come from your lusts that war in your body? You lust and do not have, so you kill. You desire to have and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have, because you do not ask. You ask, and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your passions" (James 4:1-3, MEV).

Beloved, strife is an abomination to God (Prov. 6:16-19). Strife affects the anointing and the flow of the Holy Ghost (Ps. 133:1-3). Strife grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Strife destroys relationships (Prov. 17:9). Strife is rooted in anger (Prov. 29:22), hatred (Prov. 10:12), pride (Prov. 13:10) and a quarrelsome, self-seeking spirit (Gal. 5:14-18; Luke 22:24-27).

Ministers, let's be an example to the body of Christ about how

to behave in separations. Saints, let's walk in love even when we can't walk in agreement. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God (see Mark 5:9). {eoa}